

SNARE DRUMS:

The Main Voice in The Choir

By Bob Saylowski, Jr.

The snare drum is the most important of all the drums in a dance set, orchestra, or marching band. Most studio players own at least two snare drums because different shell materials make for different sounds applicable for certain musical situations. There are wood, brass, steel, aluminum, phenolic, fiberglass, acrylic and thermabond shells. Sizes range from 3 X 13 up to 12 X 15 marching drums. But what snare is right for you?

Due to the absorbency of their shell material, wooden snares give warm, round, resonant tones. Metal shells are more cutting, crisper, and durable with no chance of warpage. Brass shells cut even more. Fiberglass being several times denser than wood gives a bright, loud sound due to sound reflection off its surface. Acrylics are harder than wood but not as hard as fiberglass. The acrylic sound leans more toward fiberglass in brightness and accentuated highs. Unfortunately, acrylic shells are very fragile and easily split if dropped or subjected to shocks. Phenolic shells are made of compressed paper and resins for extra brillance and volume. Thermabond shells are made of silicone resins and fibers of a non-variable composition. They are virtually indestructible. Maple has exceptional tonal characteristics and projects very well considering it's a rock-hard wood.

Different sizes yield different sounds, also. Piccolo snares are "soprano" drums producing very crisp, high tones. They are available in either 3 X 13 or 4 X 14. The most popular sizes for snare drums are 5 X 14 and 5 1/2 X 14, but some rock drummers and concert drummers use a 6 1/2 X 14 for added volume and somewhat deeper tone.

There are, of course, "specialty" snare drums. The most outrageous appears to be Pearl's *Vari-Pitch*. *Vari-Pitch* snares

utilize a phenolic shell in 5 X 14, 6 1/2 X 14, or 10 X 14 sizes with a *Roto-tom* on top, essentially a *Roto-snare!* By raising or lowering the *Roto-tom* in the shell, different sounds will occur due to total venting of the drum. The head may be rotated just like a *Roto-tom* to bring the drum to a definite pitch. The C & C *Compacto* snare drum expands to different sizes, somewhat like *Vari-Pitch*. Hinger *Touch-Tone* manufactures a 6 1/2 X 14 drum made of VA" pure steel that weighs 37 1/2 pounds! Primarily used in concert situations, this drum is reputed to be the best snare drum presently made. It's really responsive and uses snare strands made of nylon-coated steel for a sound between wire and gut. Premier has a *Resonator* snare drum: a double shell drum with a chrome-finished outer shell and a thin wooden shell inside. The two shells are separated by a pocket of air. The *Resonator* is probably one of the most powerful drums around. Slingerland says their *Two-To-One* drum has no soft spots and will stay in tune for the longest time. The *Two-To-One* has 12 lugs on top and 6 lugs on the bottom; all totally separated, so the drum will be tensioned evenly wherever you hit it. Thermabond shells are made only by Milestone Drums in Canada and are available in four "formulas". The wooden-sounding shells have added crispness and projection. The metal-sounding shells project added warmth. Each pair of formulas has one that sounds brighter than the other. Milestone drums are available in 5 X 14, 5 1/2 X 14, 6 X 14, 6 1/2 x 14, 7 X 14, and 10 X 14.

Basically, there are two types of strainers: center-throw and side-arm throw. Center-throw seems to be the best because of the direct drop of the snare wires. The center-throw type of strainer also seems to loosen up under strain after a

while and will throw off at anytime. However, center-throw strainers have easier operation. Side-throw strainers have a better lock-on but put more pressure on the right side of the snare wires. Also, on side-throws, the tension wheel is easier to get at. Some snare drums have double tension wheels to evenly stretch the snares across the head. Some even have separate snare adjustments which I feel are more trouble than they are worth.

It seems that a lot of rock drummers have the problem of lug screws loosening up under power strokes. There really is no way to combat this except to use a counter-lock nut of some sort. Sonor has them on their drums, but the nuts only fit their metric lugs. Hopefully, other drum companies will hear this and start producing counter-lock nuts for all snare drums.

Some studios remove the plastic coverings on drums. This allows maximum response and resonance but will also expose the bare shell to the elements which could damage it. If you have a wood shell snare that you would like to be more lively, coat the inside of the shell with polyurethane. This will make the sound bounce around more.

I've never been an advocate of internal dampening of drums. Internal mufflers press up against the head and choke it. Also, when the mufflers are turned off they tend to rattle, which causes problems when miked. Rogers makes some clip-on external mufflers which do the job just fine. Springless lugs are also a good idea to prevent any further rattling noises in the drum.

Some drummers argue that there hasn't been a decent snare drum made since the WFL Ludwig and the old Billy Gladstone. However, with all of today's choices, what's best for you is what really matters.